

# SANDRA ROMERO *Reports*

## *to the 22nd District*

January 2001



### Dear Neighbor:

**First of all, I want to emphasize my gratitude for the continued honor of representing our Thurston County region in the Legislature.** I certainly look forward to Representative Sam Hunt joining Senator Karen Fraser and me on the 22nd Legislative District team. We all wish Representative Cathy Wolfe the very best in her new endeavors as a Thurston County commissioner.

Thank you for taking the time to review my newsletter today. **The subject is our state's election laws — specifically, the way our primaries are conducted.**

As I think most of you know, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled against California's open, blanket-primary system, which is similar to ours. California's system, said the Supreme Court, infringes on the First Amendment rights of political parties as they go about selecting nominees. **(It should be emphasized here that the Supreme Court ruling may impact only our primary — not the general-election process.)**

### Elections:

#### **Basic rights at stake for all Washington citizens**

Based on the court's decision that blanket primaries are unconstitutional, Alaska, too, has taken steps to end its blanket primary. **We're now the only state with such a primary.** The two major parties here are waiting to see how the Legislature addresses both the high court's ruling against such systems and our responsibility to guarantee basic, fundamental voting rights.

Right now, our blanket primary has no requirement that voters declare a party affiliation when they register — you can vote for anyone and any party you want. And importantly, there's no public record of either the candidate or the party you support.

Generally, the top vote-getters from each of the parties advance to the general election. Most state laws require major political parties to nominate statewide candidates by primaries. Alabama and Virginia laws permit the parties to use either primaries or conventions, and some states require political parties to hold preprimary conventions to endorse candidates.

Most states require either that you declare a party affiliation when registering to vote or that you make such a declaration when you vote. In some states, a person's party preference is sent to the parties upon request.

#### **Primary rules stem from our state's 'progressive' history**

Washington citizens nearly a century ago reformed the system. (Party conventions usually nominated candidates from the time of statehood in 1889 until 1907, when direct primaries were established and voters asked for a specific party's primary ballot.)

By 1935, an initiative made Washington the first state in the nation to adopt the (current) blanket-primary system. (Alaska followed suit in 1947, and California — also by initiative — came along in 1996.)

Our blanket-primary system here was upheld by the state Supreme Court in 1980. Two federal-court decisions in the last couple years supported the California (and our) blanket primary. If the two major parties agreed, our state even today could probably keep the current system in place without violating the First Amendment.



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# REPRESENTATIVE SANDRA ROMERO

## Reports to the 22nd District

### What other states do:

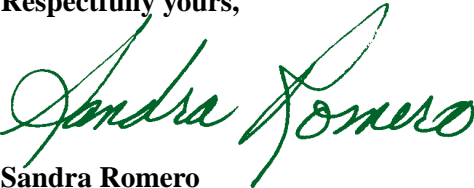
- In other states, a wide variety of primaries are held. Their differing standards:
- Require party identification at voter-registration.
  - Exclude independents and voters not affiliated with a major party.
  - Allow independents to select the ballot of a major party.
  - Require voters to publicly declare which party's ballot they want at the polls.
  - Permit the choice of a party ballot in the voting booth.
  - Don't require party-registration and do allow voters to vote for any candidate. The top vote-getters advance to the general election — a requirement that could result in two candidates from the same party facing each other in the general. A candidate receiving more than 50 percent of the primary vote is declared the winner.

### Choices:

### I'd like to know your thoughts about these issues

Before the Legislature gets too far in the discussion process, I want to see what you have to say. Please take a few minutes — or as long as you want — to tell me your thoughts on our alternatives. When you're done, put your comments in an envelope and send them back to me. **Thanks again!**

Respectfully yours,



Sandra Romero  
State Representative  
22nd Legislative District

Dear Sandra: \_\_\_\_\_

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Sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

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**Elections:**  
**Basic rights at stake**  
**for all Washington citizens**

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